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ABSTRACT

The New York City Board of Education's Title I program, "Learning to Read through the Arts," teaches skills in reading through involvement in the arts, builds self-confidence, improves self-image, and adds to the experiences of the participating children. If children are able to read material and apply the information thus acquired to some practical purpose, the children become interested in what they are reading and recall it with greater ease. The artist-teachers in the program build on the language the child already knows by using a language experience approach in their reading-oriented arts workshop, which may include dance, music, theatre, painting, sculpture, or crafts. Reading proficiency is developed through following directions, drawing inferences, thinking sequentially, and using specialized vocabulary. Class journals, logs, and diaries are kept, in which information and directions acquired in the workshop and reactions to field trips are recorded regularly. Children apply reading skills through writing movie scripts and poetry, reading dramatic skits, and writing autobiographies. The program associates itself with major cultural institutions in the community, and students have an opportunity to showcase their original works in an annual exhibition and a performing arts and film festival. Program evaluations indicate that students have improved an average of one to two months in reading for each month they have participated in the program. (HTH)

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INTEGRATING ART AND READING - LEARNING TO READ THROUGH THE ARTS

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The Developer/Demonstrator Title I Children's Program: Learning to Read Through the Arts, New York City Board of Education addresses itself to children who are of an age when their ideas about art are not yet formulated and they are most receptive to creative inspiration. When given encouragement and opportunity, most children will express themselves creatively. The success and sense of achievement gained from completing a work of art can give the child confidence which can then be transferred and applied to other areas of learning.

The dominant theme of the program is the teaching of skills in reading through involvement in the arts--performing, plastic and film. The underlying theme is to build self-confidence, improve self-image, and add to the experiences of the participating child.

Integration of a Total Art Program and Total Reading Program

The nationally, state and city validated exemplary, Developer/Demonstrator, multi-district Title I Children's Program: Learning to Read Through the Arts, The Board of Education of the City of New York is an experiential program. It is an intensive, individualized, reading program that focuses on the improvement of reading skills through the integration of a total art program with a total reading program.

The child sees, hears, touches, smells, and/or tastes his products! Each of these learning experiences has been designed to help him to perceive, recall and reinforce what he is learning. The process is as important as the product.

Listening, speaking, writing and reading techniques are stressed in the reading-oriented arts workshops. A diagnostic, prescriptive approach to reading is stressed in the reading workshops. The staff includes reading teachers, artist teachers and classroom teachers working as a team.

An Illustration of the Methodology

Some of the skills learned in the art experience will be valuable to him in his reading, and vice versa. In order to succeed in this, however, a clear linkage must be made so that the learner will begin to correlate the many skills learned in the different disciplines. The Learning to Read Through the Arts methodology attempts to make this crucial linkage for each learner. For example, the teacher presents a work of art--a painting, in this case--to the child; together, they notice the details of the painting and use the spoken and written word to describe them. As the child works on his own painting, using various colors and shapes and designs, it becomes possible for him/her to use the words which describe his/her own work. He is helped to use this vocabulary in his reading and writing, too. As he becomes aware of the details which are developing his own painting, he now finds that the details may

also be described through language. He moves from the concrete (nonverbal) to the abstract (verbal) experience. It is a simple matter to convert this knowledge into written form, by presenting to the child, reading exercises in "grasping detail," for instance, which will now have become personally meaningful to him.

We have found that if children are able to read material and apply the information thus acquired to some practical purpose, the children are interested in what they are reading and they recall what they have read. Reading becomes a tool to learn more about the arts.

Art Teachers Implement the Methodology

The artist teachers are trained in the Learning to Read Through the Arts methodology. They build on the language the child already knows by using a Learning to Read Through the Arts language experience approach in their reading-oriented arts workshop. The Reading-Oriented Arts Workshops may include dance, music, theater, filmmaking, photography, puppetry, drawing, painting, sculpture, printmaking or world crafts. In a language experience approach the following procedures work well: the art teachers and pupils decide on an art project; the students verbalize about the experience with the teachers. As the students express themselves, the teacher elicits a few sentences that sum up what has been said. A short composition is written by the teacher in the master journal while the pupils watch. The instructor calls attention to details that are important to reading such as letter formation, association of sounds with symbols, repetition of the same sounds or symbols, the function of captialization and punctuation, phrasing and vocabulary development. The group composition serves as the basis for discussion in which letters and words are recognized.

Each student maintains a personal, individual journal. In it he copies the writing of the master journal as well as his statement of purpose for each art project, relevant technical information and writings that are inspired from the art books in the reading corner.

Re-reading of the entries in the teacher's master journal and in the student's log is scheduled. The purpose is to recall vocabulary and to reinforce comprehension.

Reading Proficiency Developed through Need to Use Special Skills

Within the context of creative activity, reading proficiency is developed through the Learning to Read Through the Arts language experience approach in the need for following directions, drawing inferences, thinking sequentially, and using specialized vocabulary. Class journals, logs, and diaries are kept in which information and directions acquired in the workshop and reactions to field trips are recorded on a regular basis. Children are involved creatively in applying reading skills through such activities as writing movie scripts and poetry, reading dramatic skits and writing autobiographies to accompany self-portraits. A great variety of literature about the arts, used also in the reading workshops, is read in depth in the arts workshops.

The art teacher, in collaboration with the reading teacher, determines, in advance, the vocabulary required for discussion and completion of each art project. These words are lettered and posted around the art room and referred to frequently.

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The artist teacher may ask students to write the words in context, in the form of a definition, a story or an information account. Throughout the life of the art project these words are repeated . . . verbally and visually. The vocabulary may be specialized or normed to grade level. The instructor corrects the student journals and written materials for language and content.

The reading teachers use an individualized, prescriptive, remediation or enrichment approach. The students' reading weaknesses are diagnosed through the Wisconsin Design Skill Development Tests, the California Reading Achievement Test and informal testing.

Variety and Breadth of Input into Program

Most of the prescriptive materials are teacher-made because the content of the reading relates to the ongoing art projects rather than a standard, prepared reading text. Books, stencils, story boards, charts, filmstrips, tapes and recordings are some of the materials used in the multimedia center. The design also includes student participation in research, as children are encouraged to seek information about their art projects. These factors allow the youngsters to develop and build their interest and appreciation in the arts in reading. The specialized vocabulary and grade level vocabulary are exchanged by the arts and reading specialists, in order that each specialist will reinforce the learning in both the arts and reading workshops.

In addition to the arts and reading workshops, children go on regular field trips to cultural institutions and educational resource sites. Special events and/or performances are also brought to the program periodically. In this way the students have an opportunity to research a primary source such as an original painting, sculpture or manuscript, or they may see a professional theater performance, dance performance or hear a concert.

It has always been a commitment of the program to associate itself with major cultural institutions in the community where the program takes place, such as The Bronx Museum of the Arts, The New York Aquarium, The Queens Museum, The Staten Island Children's Museum and The Brooklyn Museum.

The students are also given the opportunity to showcase their own original works and accomplishments in the annual "Learning to Read Through the Arts Exhibition" and "The Performing Arts and Film Festival."

Last year the children's exhibition and performances were held at the School of Visual Arts Museum and the boroughwide Learning to Read Through the Arts Centers in the city.

Parents Play an Important Part in Program

Parents' workshops are an important part of the program in order that the parents may understand the program, learn how children learn, and have an opportunity to discuss family living. Also, the parents may serve as workshop or field trip assistants or become members of the program's Advisory Board. We found this aspect of the program most valuable to everyone involved in the project.

Pre-service and in-service training are necessary for both art and reading specialists and staff. An ongoing evaluation of the project is a major feature.

According to the evaluator, Paul Heintz of New York University, the Title I Children's Program: Learning to Read Through the Arts "provides a unique opportunity for organizing instruction that is based on current learning theory and research in education and psychology. Cognitive theorists posit that students learn most readily if exposed to knowledge, concepts or skill in sequence that proceeds from concrete to abstract. It is highly likely, therefore, that the success of the current program in enabling students who were previously unsuccessful in reading to make significant gains in reading is, in large part, due to the goodness of fit that has been achieved between the program activities and the way children are naturally set to learn."

Positive Results of an Examplary Program

Since 1971, the evaluations of past programs have shown that the students have improved an average of 1 to 2 months in reading for each month they have participated in the program as measured by standardized reading tests.

The Title I Children's Program: Learning to Read Through the Arts, The Board of Education of the City of New York received national recognition when the American Institute of Research for the National Right to Read Effort chose it as one of twelve exemplary reading programs in the United States. It was validated by the Joint Dissemination Review Panel of the United States Office of Education. The program was also selected by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare as one of thirty-three exemplary Title I Programs in the nation. This Title I Learning to Read Through the Arts Children's Program is a Developer/Demonstrator project of the United States Office of Education, National Diffusion Network. In 1981 the program was selected by the Office of the Chancellor as one of the four exemplary programs for use in the promotional gates classes throughout the city. Commencing 1978-1979 the program has expanded to five sites in the boroughs of Manhattan, Staten Island, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx in New York City. The program also services special education children. In the summer of 1981 the Division of Special Education used the Learning to Read Through the Arts program as its citywide Special Education Summer program located at twenty city sites.

There are replication programs of the Title I Children's Program: Learning to Read Through the Arts in both rural and urban areas in such states as Arizona, California, Maryland, Michigan, North Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Texas and Wyoming.